



March, 2012

Alienation and Human Relationship in Anita Desai's Novel "Where Shall We Go This Summer?"



*** Babita**

*** Research Scholar, School of Distance & Continuing Education Dravidian University, Kuppam (A.P.)**

Anita Desai (June 24, 1937), the most significant novelist as a young woman, when she was very seriously writing, or trying to write anyway, it was British literature like Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster who influenced her. They were her models in those days. Then later she discovered and really revered the Russian writers - Chekhov, Dostoevsky above all. Desai is part of a new literacy tradition of Indian writing in English, which dates back only to the 1930's or 1940's. She explains that this is because that at one time all literature was recited rather than read and that remains the tradition in India. It is still rather a strange act to buy a book & read it an unusual thing to do. Her new style of writing is also different from many Indian writers, as it is much less conservative than Indian literature has been in the past. She portrays the cultural and social changes that India has undergone as she focuses on the incredible power of family and society and the relationships and the alienation between family members, paying close attention to the trials of women, suppressed by Indian society. The study of isolation experienced by women in a male dominated society is a significant modern trend. In the Indian society women are not allowed to play any active role in decision-making. They are ignored or brushed aside. In such situations, Anita Desai tries to focus on the predicament of women in the society.

The title of the novel "Where Shall We go This Summer?" incorporates the central question in the life of Sita, the leading female character in the novel 'We' stands for the couple Sita & Raman. If we remove "this summer" from the title, the question becomes universal and eternal. It is everybody's question - where shall we go in life? The protagonist of this novel is Sita, through whom the novelist tries to portray the psyche of a married woman. The protagonist tends to cherish her native dreams of a romantic married life and confronts with commonplace realities of life, with severe joints to her expectations. Sita, being a mature female, carves out a meaningful pattern and adopts various strategies to cope with stressful situations. She is forty years old woman, awaiting the birth of her fifth child. Her experiences as a house-wife and mother are jarring and she is in deep anguish. The

novelist, through the treatment of the journey of Sita in terms of marital relationships, forays into the feminine psyche, trapped in the chauvinistic male-dominated society. The novel helps us to see the abundant depth of a woman's heart as a member, a wife, a victim & never as a heroine. Sita realizes that marital happiness is not possible in her life, and that all her efforts are crushed by the insensitive & cruel, society which is male-dominated. She exists among conditions often bordering on despair. She is like Maya of Cry, the Peacock, highly strung and has heightened imagination that makes Prof. Tripathi assert : "In possessing more than ordinary organic sensitivity she is younger sister of Maya, the heroine in cry, the Peacock" .

Her mother had vanished and her father was always surrounded with the aura of a national leader. She had little or no communication with her own children as a result, Sita grew up with a morbid notion that she "came into the world motherless." But she dotes on her father like Maya, as her ideal. She lived a solitary life and grew up solitary on a desolate, rain-splattered island when her father died, she was alone. But Raman, the son of her father's friend, became voluntarily in charge of her and, as she flatly states, "out of pity, out of lust, out of sudden will for adventure, and because it was inevitable-married her." After marriage, Sita suddenly out of a solitary life of girlhood, entered into a conventional placid family. She describes her husband's family thus. She never got used to anyone when they lived, in the first years of their married lives, with his family in their age-rotted flat off Queen Road, she had vibrated and throbbed in revolt against their almost sub-human placidity, calmness and sluggishness. The more stolid and still and calm they were, the more she thrummed, as though frantic with fear and their sub-humanity-might swamp her. She behaved provocatively - " it was there that she started smoking, a thing that had never been done in their household by any woman and even by man , only in secret, and began to speak in sudden rushes of emotion as through flinging darts at their smooth unscarred faces." The woman of her family spend their time in cooking, planning & eating meals. This is something new and unreal for Sita. She is a rebel and when she can't ignore the kitchen life, the kitchen

odours and sounds and they overpower her, she revolts by accepting, but not the kitchen and the ways of the women of her in-laws, rather, she takes to smoking instead of eating, to starving about her in silence, to speaking provocatively. All the woman protagonists of Desai's fiction are like Sita, who when faced with a choice between conviction and conformity, unhesitatingly choose the former and plunge into great deal of suffering and social ostracism. When Sita speaks provocatively no one answers her questions and no one complaints of her to her husband as woman in another household might have done. Her household had exceptional capacity to expand and accept even an outrageous outsider like Sita, but beyond that they do not stir themselves.

The whole household wishes only to be left in place; to eat and to digest. Sita is forced to think of them that they are nothing. Sita storms within herself and feels suffocated at their vegetarian complacency. Sita is unhappy in the present circumstances of her life, so, she shifts to a small flat with Raman, but life is not better. People continue to come and be unaccepted to her. The reality of life and its happiness becomes oppressive for her. She fights a lone protected battle for her right to love and happiness, but like every woman of India, however hard she tries to rise out of the slime like a lotus flower, she is relentlessly ploughed back into the mire. Raman's prose and Sita's passion only emphasize the distance between the two. It only points out her inability to connect the individual with the society. Hence B. Ramachandera observes: "The novel may, thus, be seen as a parable on the inability of human being to relate the inner with the outer, the individual with society." Sita's view of the world is so blurred that she feels alienated from everyone. She feels that her husband and her children thrive in a world where careless and cruel density is a mere freak, a temporary and doomed occurrence. Every act of unthinking violence-her boys fighting a duel like their heroes in the films; Maneka want only ripping buds off a plant or shredding her paintings; the youngest child, Karan demolishing his toys with Karate blows; Raman munching his breakfast nosily, while she tries to struggle with a pop gun to frighten away the crows who are a bend upon enjoying eating a fallen eagle each act frightens her due to its cruelty. Not only this,

the violence in the world of reality at large, like violent news in the newspapers endless faith in block of flats and in streets, every thing discourages her from giving birth in her world. As the ordinary life and world grow insufferable to her, she feels like a moth.

In this novel, marital relations as well as abnormal man-woman relationship have been portrayed with a remarkable poignancy. Sita is a married woman & has four children, but in the very picture of misery and dejection. She feels herself to be a prisoner in a house which offers her nothing but a crust of dull tedium, of hopeless disappointment. Her unhappiness in married life finds expression in feelings of contempt for the friends and colleagues of her husband.

Sita, a mother of four children, is pregnant, but she does not want to give birth to another child that is in her womb, and with this intention she decides to live in Manor! - an island which appears to be a land of magic. After spending quite a few months there, she realizes that her effort to be away from her husband and the other two children whom she had left with him, is no more than fantasy. When her husband, Raman arrives in the island and persuades her to go back with him-. She agrees to do so and thus she, -makes-a compromise with her situation. It is necessary to refer to the fact, suggestively described in the novel, that Sita's own attitude to married life must have been warped by the knowledge and experiences in regard to her own parents. Her mother ran away to Benares leaving her husband and children behind and gave no information about herself. No reason for this conduct of Sit's mother has been given, but it has been suggested that her husband had kept a mistress. Then the most shocking experience for Sita must have been that though her father had participated in the country's struggle for freedom and though after he had dedicated himself to the service of the common people in Manori, yet he had incestuous desire for his own daughter - Sita's step-sister. By introducing this element in the novel, Desai wants to bring home to her reader abnormality about man-woman relationship. How the suppressed sexual desire of an extraordinary man become the cause of angularity and abnormality - all this has been described as one of the themes of the novel "Where Shall We Go This Summer"?

REFERENCE

Submitted For The Consideration of Degree Committee (Academic Commtee) Of Ph.d In English) (P.210

¹ J.P. Tripathi, "The Mind and Art of Anita Desai", (Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1986), P. 74. ² Anita Desai: Where Shall We Go This Summer? (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1982), P. 84. ³ Ibid., P. 99. ⁴ Ibid., P. 48. ⁵ B. Ramachandra Rao: The Novels of Mrs. Anita Desai: A Study, (New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers, 1977), P. 59.